212 From the central core of creation four categories of signs have
812 emerged, 266 in all, which represent the complete signs of the world; they give color, form, and matter to things. In time these 266 signs came to head lists of an infinity of other signs encompassing all of creation.

"It is by these signs that man enters into possession of the greatest part of his domain, which is the universe. And in the measure that he does not know a sign, that he cannot analyze it, that is, possess it in its component parts, he finds certain sectors of the total knowledge of things closed to him." (1)

1. M. Griaule and G. Dieterlen, Signes graphiques soudanais [Sudanese Graphic Signs].

815 The Bambara, like the Dogon, represent the movement of the stars graphically as well as mathematically, and, in particular, the revolution of the sun around the earth, center of the cosmos. These movements are measured by a cylindrical granary that they use as gnomon (wati dyati dyiginye); it is a round structure of seko [plaited walling?] with a conical roof, constructed according to precise measurements. It rests on a small packed mound in the form of a square which has first been carefully measured and oriented. Twenty-two stones are buried in each angle of the square, and 22 more in the center. Three rows of four big stones are oriented east-west on the little hill: one row on the southern side, one to the north, and one in the middle. Small wooden beams are laid on these rows. Each part and each measurement has a symbolic meaning. The gnomon serves to determine the dates of the solstices and the equinoxes by the observation of its shadow on the ground. (2)

2. D. Zahan, "Un gnomon soudanais" [A Sudanese Gnomon], Africa, 1950.

805 The diurnal and annual movements of the sun are represented
815 by a zigzag line, ⋀⋀ . Certain variations in the form of the zigzag represent the procession of the equinoxes and the variable length of the days in summer and winter, ⋀⋀ . Four angles represent the four cardinal points, and each of the lines that make up

the angles represents 90 days (the year, for the Bambara, is 360 days). The symbols are not merely mathematical; they form part of the daily life of the society. [18] The zigzags are a characteristic theme in the decoration of pottery, weapons, tools, sanctuaries, and houses. One finds them in agricultural techniques and in ritual dance figures. The universal rhythms of the earth and sky echo through all the activities of man and society. (1) Finally, another series of 16 signs

1. Id., "Conception de l'écliptique chez les Dogons et les Bambara" [The Dogon and Bambara Conception of the Ecliptic]. [Ed., Africa, 1951.]

is habitually used in geomancy. It is interesting to note that these signs were used in a practical manner for correspondence. The Bambara chiefs used multiple combinations of them to send each other messages.

G. Local Diversities

Given the extent and the diversity of the regions where Bambara is spoken, it is no wonder one notices differences in pronunciation, and even in structure and vocabulary, from one province to another. At Kaarta the speech is not the same as at Ségou, and a Bambara of Ségou has trouble understanding a Bambara of Bougouni. This is due partly to the influence of other languages which are in contact with Bambara and which ultimately alter and modify it, and partly to the normal evolution of language within a group separated for centuries from its place of origin. It is interesting to note that in the Bougouni circle the conservatives in speech are the old men, while the women are the evolutionary element.

Traditionally, Ségou was considered the center for the most elegant Bambara speech. Before the conquest, children were sent to Ségou to learn the purest Bambara.